

24 April 1973

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: People's Self-Defense Force

1. The People's Self-Defense Force (PSDF) came into existence immediately after the 1968 Tet Offensive. Designed only to provide the minimum of security at the local level, the PSDF now numbers just over one million in its combat element.

2. The armed PSDF's main duty is to assume local security functions in conjunction with National Police elements in "A" and "B" hamlets. This role has enabled Regional Force and Popular Force elements to be released from province and village security functions for combat duty in other areas. This became a much more important function during the 1972 Easter offensive when the rapid shifting of forces from one hot spot to another was necessary.

3. In addition to its security functions, in some areas, during the 1972 Easter offensive the PSDF assumed a greater, but still limited, combat role. In some instances they have been integrated with regular forces and committed to combat. They also have been organized as combat formations, officered by the RF, and given a more extensive combat role. Along with a greater commitment to combat, of course, has come greater losses in personnel and weapons. Some of these losses have resulted from the PSDF being committed to missions which were beyond their limited capacities.

4. Service in the combat PSDF is required under the National Mobilization Law for male citizens of ages 16-17 and those between 38 and 50. They serve without pay, are not issued uniforms and usually are under the control of a village chief. Females and elders may, and do, volunteer for the combat PSDF. A second category of PSDF, the Combat

Support, is voluntary and all citizens over seven years of age are eligible. This latter group performs mainly first-aid, medical evacuation and fire-fighting duties. It is also a means by which the government can commit large blocs of the population to various socio-economic programs.

5. A breakdown of PSDF follows:*

Combat	1,000,000
Combat Support	2,800,000
Weapons in hands of PSDF	558,000**

* As of September 1972; no later data available

** Weapons are probably rotated from man to man within a unit rather than kept by an individual.